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160810Z Apr 02

2002HOCHI00390 - UNCLASSIFIED

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ACTION EAP-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AID-00	AMAD-00	CIAE-00	SRPP-00	DS-00
	EB-00	ED-01	FBIE-00	UTED-00	VC-00	HHS-01	H-01
	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00	L-00	VCE-00	AC-01	NSAE-00
	OIC-02	OMB-01	OPIC-01	PA-00	PER-00	PM-00	PRS-00
	ACE-00	P-00	SP-00	STR-00	TEST-00	TRSE-00	USIE-00
	PMB-00	DSCC-00	PRM-00	DRL-02	G-00	NFAT-00	SAS-00
	SWCI-00	/010W					

-----86C6E1 160854Z /38

FM AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6237
INFO AMEMBASSY HANOI
USMISSION GENEVA
ASEAN COLLECTIVE
USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI
JICPAC HONOLULU HI
SECDEF WASHDC
DIA WASHDC
NSC WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 HO CHI MINH CITY 000390

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/BCLTV AND EAP/PD/KFOSTER
DEPARTMENT ALSO FOR PRM
DEPARTMENT ALSO FOR DRL

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CINCPAC FOR FPA
SECDEF FOR ISA/EA/ABLAGG

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [PREF](#) [SOCI](#) [VM](#) [CB](#) [ETMIN](#) [HUMANR](#) [RELFREE](#)
SUBJECT: CROSSES, CADRES, AND CONVERSATIONS IN THE
CENTRAL HIGHLANDS

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: PLAIN WHITE CROSSES DREW THE ATTENTION OF CONGEN OFFICERS AS WE DROVE THROUGH THE CENTRAL HIGHLAND PROVINCE OF DAK LAK. A COFFEE BREAK IN NHAN CO COMMUNE IN DAK LAP DISTRICT ALLOWED FOR CASUAL CONVERSATION WITH SEVERAL OF THE VILLAGERS. LOCAL SECURITY OFFICERS KEPT INSERTING THEMSELVES INTO OUR CONVERSATIONS, BUT THE VILLAGERS PAID THEM NO MIND. BACK ON THE ROAD, OUR "ESCORTS" KEPT PACE ALMOST UNTIL THE PROVINCIAL BORDER. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) CG, CONOFF AND FSN POL/ECON ASSISTANT DROVE BACK TO HO CHI MINH CITY FROM DAK LAK'S CAPITAL CITY, BUON ME THUOT, ON THE NEW HIGHWAY 14. LARGE, PLAIN WHITE CROSSES OVER THE DOORWAYS OF SEVERAL HOUSES ON THE NEW HIGHWAY DREW OUR ATTENTION.

3. (SBU) CONGENOFFS STOPPED AT A COFFEE STALL NEXT TO A HOUSE WITH A WHITE CROSS OVER THE ENTRY, IN WHICH CATHOLIC RELIGIOUS ARTIFACTS WERE PLAINLY VISIBLE THROUGH THE WINDOWS AND DOORWAY. THE OWNER OF THE COFFEE STALL GREETED US IN RUSTY ENGLISH, SAYING HE HAD LEARNED THE LANGUAGE FROM HIS "MANY AMERICAN FRIENDS IN THE PAST." HE IDENTIFIED HIMSELF AS ALSO THE OWNER OF THE HOUSE NEXT DOOR. (NOTE: IN SUBSEQUENT CONVERSATION

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IN VIETNAMESE, THE MAN'S ACCENT SUGGESTED HE ORIGINALLY CAME FROM NORTHERN VIETNAM, AND MOVED SOUTH DURING THE 1954 MASS INTERNAL MIGRATION. HIS REMARKS INDICATED THAT HE MIGHT HAVE WORKED FOR THE U.S. MILITARY OR AN AMERICAN BUSINESS BEFORE 1975.)

4. (U) CONVERSATION WAS INTERRUPTED WHEN THREE MEN ARRIVED BY MOTORBIKE AND SAT DOWN AT THE CAFE'S OTHER TABLE. THE CAFE OWNER IMMEDIATELY WENT TO WAIT ON THE NEWCOMERS, ASKING IF THEY "HAD COME ON BUSINESS." THE MEN REPLIED THEY WERE JUST STOPPING FOR COFFEE, BUT IT WAS CLEAR THEY WERE PLAINCLOTHES SECURITY OFFICIALS MONITORING THE PRESENCE OF FOREIGNERS IN THEIR COMMUNE. THE CAFE OWNER JOINED THE MEN AT THEIR TABLE, BUT DID NOT SEEM CONCERNED ABOUT OUR PRESENCE. HE DIRECTED OCCASIONAL COMMENTS TOWARD CG FROM THE OTHER TABLE. HE WAS DELIGHTED WHEN CONOFF ASKED TO TAKE PHOTOS OF HIS

HOUSE AND THE CROSS.

15. (SBU) CONGEN GROUP PROCEEDED FURTHER UP THE ROAD AND WAS INVITED INTO AN EQUIPMENT AND VEHICLE REPAIR SHOP WITH A CROSS OVER ITS DOORWAY. THE OWNERS WERE A MIDDLE-AGED COUPLE WITH 10 GROWN CHILDREN. THEY OPENLY DISPLAYED LARGE POSTERS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II, AN ALTAR WITH THE VIRGIN MARY, AND STATUES OF SEVERAL SAINTS SURROUNDED BY CANDLES. THE WIFE SAID THE FAMILY WAS CATHOLIC AND ATTENDED A CHURCH 80 KILOMETERS AWAY. THE COUPLE SAID THAT THERE WAS A PROTESTANT CHURCH ABOUT NINE KILOMETERS AWAY, LOCATED OFF THE MAIN HIGHWAY. THE FAMILY MOVED TO NHAN CO COMMUNE SEVEN YEARS EARLIER WHEN THE AREA WAS MUCH MORE SPARSELY SETTLED. FROM UNCLASSIFIED

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BUON ME THUOT SEVEN YEARS AGO BECAUSE OF TOUGH ECONOMIC CONDITIONS???, BUT THE WIFE NOTED LIFE IN NHAN CO COMMUNE WAS WORSE. SHE CITING DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES, THE WIFE MADE AN OPEN PLEA FOR ASSISTANCE TO THE COMMUNE - CLOTHING, SCHOOL SUPPLIES, ETC. ABOUT TEN MINUTES INTO THAT CONVERSATION, A MAN ENTERED THE SHOP-CUM-HOUSE AND SAT DOWN AT THE TABLE WITHOUT SAYING A WORD. THE COUPLE DID NOT INTRODUCE THE NEWCOMER, NOR DID THE MAN GREET CONGENOFFS. HE APPEARED TO BE ANOTHER NON-UNIFORMED SECURITY OFFICER, CHECKING UP ON OUR ACTIVITIES IN THE VILLAGE.

16. (U) CONGENOFFS RETURNED TO THEIR VEHICLES AND CONTINUED DOWN HIGHWAY 14, FOLLOWED BY A CAR THAT HAD BEEN PARKED IN THE VILLAGE. ABOUT 40 MINUTES LATER, WHEN CONGENOFFS STOPPED FOR LUNCH, THE THREE MEN IN THE CAR FOLLOWED US INTO THE RESTAURANT AND MAINTAINED THEIR WATCH THROUGHOUT THE MEAL. IT WAS OBVIOUS THEY WERE PLAINCLOTHES SECURITY OFFICERS WHEN THEY HEADED FOR THEIR CAR AFTER WATCHING US PAY THE BILL. WHAT THEY DID NOT KNOW WAS THAT WE PLANNED TO EAT A WATERMELON WE HAD PURCHASED EARLIER FOR DESSERT. WHEN THE SECURITY OFFICERS NOTICED WE HAD NOT LEFT THE RESTAURANT RIGHT AFTER THEM, THEY HAD TO SEND ONE MAN BACK ON THE PRETEXT OF NOT HAVING FINISHED DRINKING ALL HIS SODA. BUT AFTER CONFIRMING CONGENOFFS HAD FINISHED DESSERT, GOTTEN INTO THEIR VAN, AND WERE DRIVING TOWARD THE BORDER (ONLY TWO MILES AWAY), THE OFFICIALS DID NOT FOLLOW.

17. (SBU) COMMENT: A NOT-VERY-SUBTLE, BUT NOT-TOO-INTRUSIVE PRESENCE OF PLAINCLOTHES SECURITY IS A REGULAR PART OF CONGEN VISITS TO THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS. BY STOPPING ON THE SPUR OF THE MOMENT IN NHAN CO COMMUNE, CONGENOFFS WERE STRUCK BY THE OPENNESS OF CATHOLICISM (WHICH IS A RECOGNIZED RELIGION IN VIETNAM) AND THE VILLAGERS' NONCHALANCE TOWARD THE LOCAL SECURITY PRESENCE.

18. (SBU) AT THE SAME TIME, WE WERE SURPRISED BY THE DEPTH OF SECURITY RESOURCES -- EVEN IN REMOTE NHAN CO COMMUNE. THREE DIFFERENT THREE DIFFERENT VEHICLES FOLLOWED US AT DIFFERENT TIMES DURING THE THREE-HOUR DRIVE THROUGH DAK LAK PROVINCE. SEVEN DIFFERENT PLAINCLOTHES OFFICERS (NOT COUNTING THE SOLDIERS WHO CRUISED UP AND DOWN HIGHWAY 14, DOING U-TURNS TO ALTERNATELY FOLLOW US OR PASS US GOING THE OPPOSITE UNCLASSIFIED

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WAY) MADE THEIR APPEARANCES AT THE COFFEE STALL, REPAIR SHOP, AND LUNCH RESTAURANT. THE PLAINCLOTHES SECURITY DID NOT OVERTLY INTERFERE IN ANY WAY. IN FACT A COUPLE OF THEM SEEMED DOWNRIGHT SHEEPISH AS THEY EAVESDROPPED ON SOME OF OUR CONVERSATIONS WITH VILLAGERS. WHAT IS CLEAR, HOWEVER, IS THAT SOMEBODY - EITHER THE GVN OR THE PROVINCIAL AUTHORITIES - WILL SPARE NO EXPENSE OR MANPOWER IN KEEPING TABS ON CONGEN MOVEMENTS IN THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS. YAMAUCHI

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